



THE  
**WITCHES**  
OF  
*Hant Hollow*  
JONATHAN'S CURSE

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**D.F. JONES**

# Copyright

The Witches of Hant Hollow

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# Dedication

To my father, the consummate storyteller.

His stories inspired me to write,  
The Witches of Hant Hollow.

I love you, Daddy.

# Acknowledgments

*The Witches of Hant Hollow* is the prequel to my Halloween short, *Antique Mirror*. Please note, some of the content changes in the novel.

I am not a witch, although some may beg to differ, but my book is pure fiction. However, there is a place called Hant Hollow. The stories circulating in the community where I grew up vary. Here's the most likely folklore regarding the origins of Hant Hollow. A swamp fire spread over the hills and valleys giving off a light in the woods which led the locals to believe in hants or ghosts.

When I was around the age of ten, my grandfather drove me to Hant Hollow one day after a church hayride on Halloween. I probably drilled him with questions so, I remember him stopping his red 1959 GMC in front of an old oak tree and pointed. He said, "That's a hangman's tree, and that's why there's hants in the hollow."

My experience kindled a lifelong interest in ghosts and the supernatural world.

I enjoy portraying strong women in my leading characters. The Witches of Hant Hollow experience discrimination that shape the witches' roles in the novel. You'll also notice Mae is a product of her time. I am grateful for all the strong women throughout history and their sacrifices for our rights and our continuing efforts for our sisters across the globe.

I love input from my family. My youngest son suggested that I change the title from Jonathan's Curse to *The Witches of Hant Hollow*. My husband came up with the idea for the *Stealths*.

Thank you again, Alicia, my editor, for your kicking insight, comments, and suggestions.

I want to thank my beta's, and the D.F. Jones Launch Team for supporting my work and spreading the news of my books. Your input, encouragement, and feedback keep me writing.

Thank you, Amanda, for designing my cover and marketing materials. You always make my books look great.

And most importantly, to my readers, thank you for supporting and sharing my books. Your word of mouth referrals, written reviews, messages, and comments are fuel for my fire to write and create new characters and books.

Hugs!

*D. F. Jones*

# Prologue

Present Day

Jasmine peered into her dressing table mirror and froze into a state of trance. Her mind's eye watched Jonathan step out of the cabin. Suddenly yanked up into the midnight air, he flew over treetops and neighborhood homes. She connected with his rush of emotions heightened by fear of crashing to the ground.

Not a car or truck in sight on the lonely country roads.

The woods of Hant Hollow rapidly became apparent as she watched him lower over a small clearing that revealed the Doanhart mansion's asymmetrical design and gambrel roof with arched windows illuminating a golden glow on the black and white facade.

He tried to run as soon as his feet hit the ground, but someone grabbed him, digging fingernails into his upper arm, drawing blood. He fought to no avail.

The massive front porch with elaborate classical elements loomed and distorted in Jasmine's view as she watched Jonathan stumble up the steps. His eyes widened as the red double door opened of its own accord.

Bile rose from her stomach, but the knot in her throat pushed it back down.

An unclear voice, neither male or female, laughed at Jonathan. "Sick? Angry? Hurt? Go ahead and tell me what you really think."

An invisible force pushed Jonathan inside making him fall on the foyer's marble floor.

Pushing up on his hands and knees, Jonathan released a deep breath and screamed, "I hate you for stealing my life, for killing my wife, and for manipulating me into doing something you wanted so desperately. But your plans backfired, didn't they? Do you really want to know what I think? I want to wrap my fingers around your scrawny neck and choke you to death."

The sinister laughter echoed in the empty house. "Who said my plans backfired?"

A hooded figure came into Jasmine's view, gripped Jonathan under the arm, and dragged him up the mahogany spiral staircase with an ornate balustrade. On the stairwell landing, portraits of women, centuries old, came to life nodding and whispering to each other as if they knew a secret Jasmine didn't, yet.

Hundreds of candles flickered and floated in the air on the third-floor ballroom. The walls and bookshelves contained antiquities, oddities, and sculptures. The sculptures seemed almost lifelike with terror-filled eyes.

The hooded figure put Jonathan in an ancient Egyptian throne made of ebony and inlaid with gold and precious stones. Glowing ropes mysteriously bound his wrists and ankles securely to the chair.

Jasmine glanced away for only a second when she heard Jonathan shout, “You! It was you this whole time?”

Out of the corner of his eye, Jonathan noticed her, and she screamed.

She shouted, but no vocal sounds came from her lips. The hooded figure spelled her.

Jasmine needed supernatural help. She summoned the Mouijah Stones.

# Chapter 1

## 1915 Rockvale, Tennessee

Jonathan tethered his two-horse team to the hitching post and went up the stairs to the general store to pick up supplies and staples for the farm.

He glanced to his right and saw a stunning woman standing next to the fabric bin. Her copper curls hung loosely over her shoulders. She turned slightly lifting her gaze to meet him.

He tipped his Stetson. “Ma’am, I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure. My name’s Jonathan Rogers.”

She smiled and lifted her chin. “Everyone in town has surely been hospitable since our arrival. I’m Mae.” She extended a gloved hand, and he looked down and for a second thought about kissing it but instead placed his hands over hers and held it a mite too long.

She politely withdrew and raised a brow. “My father is the new bank president. Perhaps, you’ve heard of him? Anthony Morgan? You should stop by and open an account.”

Jonathan chuckled while rubbing the rim of his hat. “I mean no disrespect, but I don’t trust bankers with my money.”

Mae’s mouth gaped open; then she frowned. With a distinct Southern accent, she huffed, “I’ll be sure to pass along the information to my father.” She turned her back to Jonathan and picked up a bolt of fabric.

He liked Mae straight away but left her to her business while he attended to his shopping list. Once he completed his task, he purposely ignored Mae as he walked toward the door, carrying several boxes of goods.

Out of his peripheral vision, he noticed Mae stared at him with both hands on her hips in apparent vexation as he left the store. He chuckled again and made a mental note to attend the Saturday night dance just in case Mae might be there.

After loading the buckboard, he took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his face with a red and white bandanna. He heard boys shouting and cursing up a storm behind the store.

He ran around back and found three teenage boys throwing rocks and dirt at a young



woman.

Jonathan shouted, “Stop it right now, or I’ll haul every blasted one of you to Sheriff Watson.” He stepped in front of the frightened woman, and she cowered behind him.

One of the boys yelled, “She’s a witch. Her grannie put a curse on my daddy’s backside, and he broke out with blisters full of pus.”

Jonathan narrowed his eyes and said, “Get while the getting’s good, boys. Last chance.” He pulled out his Colt and fired a round in the air. The boys took off like white lightning and disappeared down the back alley.

He knelt before the crying woman and dried her tears with his fingertips. “It’s okay. The boys are gone. By the way, my name’s Jonathan, and you must be one of the Doanharts.” He noticed the clumps of dirt on her dress and the swelling of her right eye. “If you’d like, I’d be happy to give you a ride home.”

“Those boys are mean. Oh, I’m Jasmine—Jasmine Doanhart.” Her green catlike eyes widened as she pressed her lips tight with a slight quiver in her chin.

Jonathan tried dusting off her dark blue gored skirt. “Yup, they’re mean all right. I’m afraid you’re going to have quite a shiner on your right eye. So, how about that ride?”

With a look of fear, she shook her head no. “My grandmother wouldn’t like that at all.”

“I’ll tell you what. I’ll give you a ride on my way home, and drop you off just before Hant Hollow. Is this your basket of apples?” He swiftly picked up the shiny red apples scattered on the ground and placed them back into the brown wicker basket.

Jonathan had never been to the Doanhart’s house, and for that matter, the people venturing there at night never recalled the location.

“Yes, I was taking the apples and cider to sell at the store when the boys cornered me. They broke the cider bottles and threw rocks at me shouting, ‘Witch.’”

Jonathan pushed his hat slightly off his forehead. “I don’t believe in witches. People make up things they can’t quite put their finger on.”

“Why are you so kind to me?”

“That’s how my daddy raised me.”

“Oh, okay. If you’re sure it won’t be too much trouble, I’d love that ride.” Jasmine reached for the basket as he helped her into the buckboard.

“I’ve been craving Dutch apple pie so how about I buy the apples from you?”

Jasmine smiled and nodded. “Oh, thank you. But I can’t take your money. How about we trade the apples for the ride?”

Jonathan threw his head back and laughed. “You got yourself a deal.”

On the road to Hant Hollow, the horse’s hooves clip-clopped in a steady rhythm with the jingle jangle of the harness over the occasional whinny and neigh.

He chatted with Jasmine about the new horror film *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* with James Cruze opening at the town’s nickelodeon. “Have you seen the spooky posters and decorations added to the outside of the building?”

“Oh, no, my grandmother doesn’t allow us to attend any of the pictures. I’d love to see one though.”

“You’ve never been to any films? They’re wonderful.”

She gripped the side of the buckboard as it rolled over the grooves on the dirt road. With a frown, she said, “The people in town shun us. They call us names and cross to the other side of the street when one of my family members approaches. And what happened today isn’t the first time one of us has been attacked in town. But they’ll sneak to our house in the dead of night for a healing herb when one of theirs is sick or fetch us to help with the delivery of one of their brats.”

“That’s horrible. Most of the people in town were kind to my father, and still are to me, but after my dad died, I sold our house and bought a small farm in the country not far from Hant Hollow.” He didn’t mention his weasel of a cousin stealing the family business from him.

“How did your dad die? Oh, I’m sorry, maybe I shouldn’t have asked that question.”

He didn’t want to broach that topic until he found out what happened to his father. He kept investigating even though the town doctor ruled his death as a heart attack.

His dad’s cousin, Dale, had been trying to gain control of the family mill and the property that went with it. Dale had something to do with his dad’s death—Jonathan felt it in his gut, and one day he’d prove it. One day he’d get the mill back. He didn’t want the house. Too many memories, and too many ghosts.

On the edge of Hant Hollow, Jonathan pulled on the reins. “Whoa, Ida. Whoa, Dick.” He turned and placed his right arm on the back of the buckboard’s seat. “That’s a story for another day.”

Jasmine burst into laughter. “Your horses’ names are Ida and Dick?”

He chuckled. “Yep. I didn’t name them. The quarter horses belonged to my father.” He

pulled on the brake and the horses whinnied and shook their heads. He hopped down and walked around the wagon to help Jasmine.

She held onto his hand and jumped to the ground. “Enjoy the apples, and thanks for sticking up for me.”

“No thanks needed. You head along now, and be sure to watch out for those knuckle-headed boys.” He paused for a second then asked, “Hey, you want to go to the movie with me?”

Jasmine blushed and briefly glanced to the ground before locking those incredible green eyes with his. His stomach flipped.

She reached up on tiptoe and kissed Jonathan’s cheek. “I appreciate the offer, but I have to decline. Although, you’re like a knight in one of the Grimm stories.”

He took off his hat and placed it on his chest. “Milady.” He climbed back into the buckboard and snapped the reins. “Get along. Let’s go home.” He watched Jasmine disappear into the thicket of Hant Hollow as the horses moved forward along the road.

Shaking his head, he mused over Jasmine.

The Doanharts had never given him any problems. Besides, gossip thrived in a small town, and he never gave the witches rumors any credence.

On the ride home, Jonathan’s thoughts returned to his dad’s death. The foreman of the mill had worked for their family for twenty-odd years, and he arranged to get a copy of the office key for Jonathan.

He muttered to himself, “I’ll leave early on Saturday night and make a stop by the mill before going to the dance. Just maybe, Dale left something behind that will implicate him.”

The day his dad died was like any other day in their small town. Except over breakfast, Thomas mentioned he’d met with an attorney to draw up documents naming Jonathan as a full partner. Jonathan worked for his father since he graduated high school. The larger-than-life man had been the epitome of good health and in the prime of his life. A heart attack seemed unlikely.

Dale had lost his shares to the family business in a poker game years ago, and he never forgave Thomas for claiming the debt. Then Dale produced a new will naming him the sole heir to Rogers Mill. Jonathan searched for the deed, but it had mysteriously vanished.

It seemed too coincidental to Jonathan.

Turning the team down the farm road, Jonathan shook off his thoughts about his family and whistled the latest Ziegfeld tune, “*Hello, Frisco.*”

The clouds disappeared, and the sun beat down on his face.  
Things seemed to be looking up for a change.  
He met two beautiful women today.

\* \* \*

Mae watched Jonathan leave the store without even a sideways glance in her direction. Since she'd moved to the town of Rockvale, Mae had plenty of attention from male suitors, but Jonathan Rogers captured her attention by just ignoring her.

*Easy on the eyes too.*

He wore a long sleeve white shirt rolled up to his elbows. The cut of the shirt complemented his well-defined physique. The mere thought of Jonathan made her cheeks flush.

Mr. Hubern, the storekeeper, approached Mae. "My wife's feeling poorly today, but I'm sure she'll meet with you in the next few days on making new dresses and such. I'd be happy to wrap up the bolts of fabric?"

She handed him the silk and linen. "I'd love to meet with your wife. I hear she's an excellent seamstress. Please charge those to my father and have your wife call on me when she's feeling better. Oh, one more thing, will the new Sears and Roebuck's arrive soon?"

Mr. Hubern placed the fabric bolts behind the counter, took out a ledger, and began to write down the charges. "I 'spect it'll come sometime next week. I'll send a message through the hoot and holler as soon as I get it."

She'd heard of the town's hoot and holler system always opened to two or more parties in point to point communication like Southern Bell in Atlanta. "Wonderful." She paused before leaving and leaned against the counter. "Uh, Mr. Hubern, do you know Jonathan Rogers?"

"Yes, ma'am. Jonathan's a fine fellow. Sad business though. His father owned the sawmill in town. Rumor has it there was some bad blood with his father's cousin, Dale. Poor Jonathan found his daddy deader than a doornail late one night a little over a year ago. Doc Smith said it was a heart attack, but the rumor circulating is Dale had something to do with it. With no proof, the Rogers family feud cost Jonathan the mill. Half the town is still mad over it."

Mae's hand went to her mouth. She'd heard of Dale Rogers because her father had met with him on several occasions. "Oh my, that's awful."

"Are you all right, Miss Morgan? My wife tells me all the time to keep my trap shut and stop sticking my nose in everybody's business, but everybody's business sooner or later ends up

at the store.” Hubern shrugged, then turned the ledger around for Mae to sign.

She swayed against the counter. “I’m a little light-headed.”

Mr. Hubern stepped over to the soda fountain and poured her a glass of lemonade. “Why don’t you take a seat and have a drink of lemonade?”

Mae sipped the drink. “Thank you, but I’ll be okay once I get outside. It’s stifling hot in the store. How do you stand it?” She bent over to sign the bill.

He laughed. “Aw, I’m used to it. I’ve been working in the store most of my life.”

She handed him the empty glass. “Well, tell Missus Hubern that I hope she feels better real soon. Good day, Mr. Hubern.”

“Good day to you.”

Outside in the blazing sun, Mae opened her parasol and walked along the flagstone sidewalk. Her thoughts turned to Jonathan. She wondered if he might come to the Saturday night dance, and pictured herself in his big strong arms.

She blushed from the heat of desire licking improper thoughts in her mind of the well-built farmer.

*Oh, Mae Morgan, it isn’t proper for a lady to have such sinful thoughts about a man.*

She giggled.

Shaking her head, she opened the bank door and went inside looking for her father. She glanced to his office, and two men dressed in suits sat in front of his cherry desk. He looked up and smiled, and she returned a silent greeting.

Mae glanced at the Seth Thomas clock hanging on the back wall, and under it sat a lush potted palm plant. She beamed with pride at her father’s ability to bring in a new Protectograph check writer sitting on the teller’s counter alongside a Webster pencil sharpener.

She noticed a tall, thin man dressed in elegant Edwardian style leaning against a walnut conference table looking at her as if she wore only knickers. She glanced away from his impertinent stare.

Several newspapers lay out on a side table next to two straight back chairs. Mae picked one up, and the headline read, *Lusitania Sunk by Submarine, 1300 Dead.*

Mae averted her eyes. The threat of war loomed over America. She placed the newspaper back on the table.

The tall gentleman stepped over and slightly bowed. “Hello, Miss Morgan. I’m Dale

Rogers, an associate of your father. He's in a meeting. Would you like to sit and wait with me?"

"My father speaks highly of you, but if he's busy, it's nothing that can't wait until dinner."

He reached for her hand, and she took a step back.

He asked, "Do you like the house? Have you settled in?"

"I have a few things left to unpack, but the house is beautiful. Now, who did you say were the prior owners? They took such good care of the place."

"My cousin, Thomas, and his son, Jonathan."

Mae's heart started racing. She lived in Jonathan's house. "Why did they sell?"

"Oh, my cousin died suddenly. His son decided to sell the house and purchased a place out in the country."

"And his mother? What happened to her?"

"She died in childbirth when Jonathan was small. Why are you so interested?"

"Older houses have such character, and I believe that comes from the people who lived there."

"So, you believe in ghosts?"

She tilted her head to the side. "I believe in the Holy Ghost so it seems to me there would be other ghosts too."

"You're a delight. Would you like for me to give Anthony a message?"

"Not really. I'll see Dad at dinner. Good day, sir." Before she turned, Dale grabbed her hand, bent over, and placed a kiss on it.

*The nerve of the man.*

If he weren't a business associate, she'd smack his smarmy face. She withdrew her hand and quickly left the bank.

She sensed more to the Rogers family drama than Dale let on, and she intended to find out what.

## Chapter 2

Jasmine ran into the hollow and quickly shapeshifted into a calico cat. She clawed her way up to the top of the cedar tree and watched Jonathan drive away in his wagon. His kindness and gallantry touched her heart.

Jasmine could've used magic to stop the boys, but Grandmother Iris had forbidden spellcasting in town.

She stayed in the tree until Jonathan disappeared from her sight; then she made her way home. Jasmine shifted back into her human form and stopped briefly to catch her breath.

The boys hated her, and she didn't even know them. They wanted to kill her. She read their thoughts. They might have succeeded if Jonathan hadn't intervened.

What would her grandmother do to the boys if she found out?

Iris didn't take kindly to mortals hurting her family after the murders of Aunt Silver and Cousin Aster.

Jasmine walked along the path. To the left of the house, Iris worked in the herb and vegetable garden wearing a wide-brim hat, long sleeve shirt and a wide skirt hitting at the ankles. Jasmine didn't know the exact age of her grandmother, but she didn't look a day past twenty-one, a timeless beauty with light auburn hair, cobalt blue eyes and full lips. Her peachy skin held no imperfections.

Jasmine's mother, Isidore, Aunt Peony, and Aunt Silver had different fathers. Heck, she'd never met her dad. The Witches of Hant Hollow thought loving and living with a mate meant weakness.

She'd only seen them with males during the Solstice Festivals, holiday parties, and the occasional ball. Except for Lavender, her best friend, and first cousin. She loved men, wizards, werewolves, and vampires. She didn't discriminate.

Thinking of Lavender made her smile.

Jasmine's eyes widened as Iris made an incision in her forefinger with a paring knife, then walked the garden rows allowing droplets of blood to splat into the earth.

Why was she using blood?

Jasmine made a mental note to research the use of blood in the garden during her spell, potions, and charm study time in their library. All types of books filled their library including books on light and dark magic.

She glanced down and tried dusting off her clothes once more, then ran up the porch stairs into the front foyer nearly knocking her mother down.

Isidore held her face. "What happened?"

She fell into her mother's arms and hugged her tightly. "Oh, townies again. This time a group of teenage boys tried to stone me to death, but this kind man named Jonathan saved me. He stood between the boys and me. He protected me with his life."

"A little comfrey root will fix you right up." Isidore let out a deep sigh and caressed Jasmine's cheek before pulling her into the bright yellow kitchen. "You know you aren't allowed to make friends with the mortals. We can't trust them under any circumstance. One day, they're nice to your face, and the next day, they're stoning you or worse." She pressed the herbal paste on Jasmine's eye and held it there with a cold washcloth. "Hold the compress while I make you a treat."

Lavender stepped into the kitchen and gasped. "Jasmine, who did this to you? Let me know, and they'll wish they'd never been born."

Jasmine grinned. "Oh, I'll be okay. It isn't the first time, and I'm sure it won't be the last." She repeated the story of the attack and meeting Jonathan. She omitted that he'd given her a ride home.

Lavender twirled her long white-blond hair and secured it in place with magic. "Jonathan is incredibly good-looking. Well done, Jasmine."

Isidore frowned. "Let's not encourage her, please. You know mortals are off limits. We have much to do, and so little time left to do it in. The summer festival is only a couple of weeks away."

"But mortals are so much fun to play with."

Isidore shook her head. "You are incorrigible."

"Yeah, but you love me."

Jasmine held the cloth against her eye as she shifted her position in the chair. She loved the kitchen. It was one of her favorite places in the house whether they cooked food or prepared potions.



The kitchen had bright yellow walls, tall cedar cabinets, and a large stone fireplace the length of the back wall that was big enough to roast a pig or contain several large black kettle pots. Twelve-foot arched bay windows let in loads of natural lighting in the day, and stars and moonlight streamed in at night.

Isidore sat a plate of tea cakes and a pitcher of milk on the table. “After you finish your treats, I need you to start washing the vegetables to prepare for canning. Iris is hiring servants for the celebration, but she wants to use our recipes.”

Lavender rolled her eyes. “Why can’t we just use magic? It’s much faster, and it tastes the same.”

“Magic has a time and place but expends much energy. You may not enjoy the practice of spellcasting later if you spend your energy on menial tasks now.” She turned to Jasmine while wiping her hands off with a dish towel. “You’ve been named the fortune teller for the summer festival.”

Jasmine’s face lit up. “I can’t believe it. Really?” She had a gift in foretelling the future and only used tarot cards and tea leaves as props for the mortals.

Her mom nodded and smiled.

Lavender said, “Aunt Esiey, tell us about the old ones.”

“You’re stalling, precious. But if you promise to help me the rest of the afternoon, I’ll tell you the story, again.”

“Promise.”

Isidore continued washing the vegetables without looking up. “Once upon a time, there was a group of influential and talented women descended from the Celts. The women fought against the underworld of darkness with the divine powers from the Goddess of Light. Our leader, Dreena, the Lady of Light, passed down the knowledge and gifts from one generation to another. The Doanharts trained with the best of the ancient ones and that’s why our library is full of books and documents. Some of the sacred scrolls predate the Babylonian era.”

Jasmine removed the compress. “I met Dreena last year. She doesn’t age either, and she’s incredibly beautiful. I hear she’s coming to the celebration.”

Isidore brought the vegetables over to the fireplace and scraped them into the boiling pot. “Yes, and she’s staying with us. So, that’s why we must finish canning and gathering the food stores. The house will be full of guests.”

Jasmine went over to the well and drew a pail of water, then placed it on the wood-burning stove to boil.

Lavender said, "Come on, Aunt Esiey, finish the story. You're getting to the good part."

"Well, let me see, where was I? Oh yes, in the beginning, the mortals living in our community held our wise women and our powers sacred. Until one day, a group of men arrived wearing long black robes, black caps, and they had long beards. The men proclaimed to the community that the wise women's magic came from the devil. The men called the women, witches, and made the people scared of the women they'd known all their lives. The men blamed the wise women for every sickness and misfortune in the community."

The mantel over the fireplace held jars of herbs and spices. Isidore chose carefully from each jar, sprinkling the contents into the kettle as she continued the story. "Many of the gifted women, that had saved many lives in the community, were tortured and killed while the other wise women took the sacred documents and fled to the four corners of the world to escape the wrath of the black-robed men. Those men are why we're called witches. Personally, I wear the witch name as a badge of honor to those that sacrificed their lives so that we could live."

Jasmine stirred one of the black kettle pots. "But our magic comes from the light, not the darkness."

Isidore glanced up and said, "Well, yes and no. That's when the two factions of our people formed. The first group of wise women remains faithful to Dreena, the reigning Lady of Light, and the second group follows Urslina, who formed a separate group of witches using the dark arts. To this day, the Lady of Light and the Queen of the Dark Night are constantly at odds. We come together during the winter and summer solstice celebrations to reconcile."

Jasmine said, "But both sides want to control the magic."

Isidore slowly stirred the pot, scraping the sides. "Yes, that is unfortunate. Just remember, once a witch calls upon Urslina and the dark powers, they rarely return to the light. Don't open the door to evil unless you want it to come in. Iris teaches us from the Book of Light, but she practices the dark arts, and its power remains within her."

Jasmine shuddered. "No doubt. She scares me to death sometimes."

"Me too, and her foul moods are ghastly."

"Girls, you're disrespectful."

Lavender shrugged. "Well, it's the truth."

“I believe Iris had a chance of returning to the light once. I think she loved Jonathan’s father. Thomas almost succeeded in destroying the darkness within her, but unfortunately, in the end, he only made the darkness grow.”

“My Jonathan?” Jasmine asked in shock.

Lavender laughed and playfully shoved Jasmine. Mimicking Jasmine’s voice, she said,

“My Jonathan?”

Jasmine zapped Lavender in the behind, and she yelped.

Jasmine asked, “How? What did he do?”

“He married Jonathan’s mother.”

Jasmine said, “Well, then, let’s not tell Iris about me meeting him today.”

Isidore smiled. “It’s probably wise. Why don’t you and Lavender go on to the library and start studying the Book of Spells? You never know when Iris will give you a test.”

“I thought we were canning vegetables.”

“We are, but I have to parboil them a couple of times and then allow the vegetables to cool. I’ll call you when I need help.”

“All right. There’s something I want to look up anyway.”

Isidore nodded, and then Jasmine and Lavender raced down the wide hallway.

At the door of the library, Lavender looked both ways and whispered, “Don’t tell. I’m meeting Brody in the glen. He’s trekking the terrain for the layout of the festival. I do love a man in the Mage Alliance uniform.” She popped out of sight.

Jasmine shook her head and entered the library. She loved the smell of old books. Each book released a different scent and the chemicals within the pages carried messages to her brain. She’d read most of them.

*Jasmine.*

Her ears pricked at the sound of her name.

*Jasmine.*

She turned and followed the sound to the oldest section of the library where the forbidden hand-written books on delicate papyrus, rolled scrolls, and ancient leather-bound books filled the top tier of the bookshelves.

She glanced over her shoulder and wiggled her finger to lock the library door and then floated to the second landing. Her fingers scanned across the books searching for the one calling

out to her.

*Jasmine.*

The hair on the nape of her neck rose. Light shimmered through the windows catching the dust particles dancing in the air.

She closed her eyes and concentrated on the sound of her name.

*Jasmine.*

Holding her hand's palms up, she said, "Come to me and let me see the book that beckons me." She peeked through one eye, then opened the other. No book appeared, but behind the scrolls, a golden light glimmered.

Iris would kill her if she caught Jasmine sifting through the archaic texts. The ancient manuscripts were the oldest in the library and forbidden to all, except Iris.

As the scrolls parted, what looked like an antique jewelry box with mother-of-pearl inlay opened to her.

*Pick up the golden jeweled stone.*

Her fingers trembled as she pulled the box to the edge of the wooden shelf and opened the lid. She found two round golden sun discs each encrusted with large ruby stone similar in shape and size engraved with what appeared to be hieroglyphics. But they weren't Egyptian. She'd studied Egyptian hieroglyphics, and her grandmother owned several ancient Egyptian pieces.

Part of her told Jasmine to put the box back, but her curiosity got the better of her.

She picked up the disc and faded from the library into a room bathed in warm sunlight. The incandescence filled the dense air.

No sky. No ground.

"I am the Goddess of Light, and you're holding the Mouijah Stones."

Jasmine wanted to throw herself at the feet of the light, but nothing existed except the sound of her voice. So, she bowed her head and lowered her eyes.

"You don't need to fear me. I'm here to warn you of an encompassing darkness. One that will try to claim your soul. But you will not let it. I'm here to help you. I have always been here. I understand you feel strange, but it will pass. Light and Darkness have coexisted for many millennia. You cannot have one without the other. The Lord Darkness, you call death, comes for each being. But you do not have to give him your soul."

Jasmine rocked back and forth in a weightless state. She worried for a second she might

vomit on the Goddess. Headiness and heaviness nearly took her, but somehow, she managed to stay alert.

Tongue-tied, Jasmine wanted to ask questions, but what?

“Are you flesh or spirit?” It sounded better in her mind than when she asked the question.

“I am both. I understand you’re overwhelmed. Open your ears that you may hear. There are two discs. One is to call me, and the other is to call the Lord Darkness. When you need guidance, I am here. No one will ever know of our conversations, especially not your grandmother. But remember, if you ever call on the Lord Darkness, he will expect payment. He will expect a soul.”

She nodded. “I-I’m not quite sure what to ask except, why me?”

“You have a generous heart, and you seek to help and not harm.”

She frowned. “How did the discs end up in our library?”

“Your grandmother stole them for Urslina. She was called to keep them safe, but she is changing, and I no longer trust her.”

“How am I to help? What do you want from me?”

“You will know how to help and what I want when the time is right.”

The light faded and once again Jasmine stood in library holding the sun disc. She placed it back in the box and the box melted into the scrolls.

Did she want the responsibility of caring for the Mouijah Stones?

She spoke softly. “I will try and honor you, Goddess of Light.”

Her chest tightened as the realization struck her that she’d been called to offset her grandmother’s darkness.

An invisible line drawn in the sand with two witches living in the same house wielding the enormous powers of the Light and Dark magic.

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